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# THE CABINET

## TALKS WITH EXPERTS.

### IV.—HENRI DE MORGAN ON GREEK VASES.

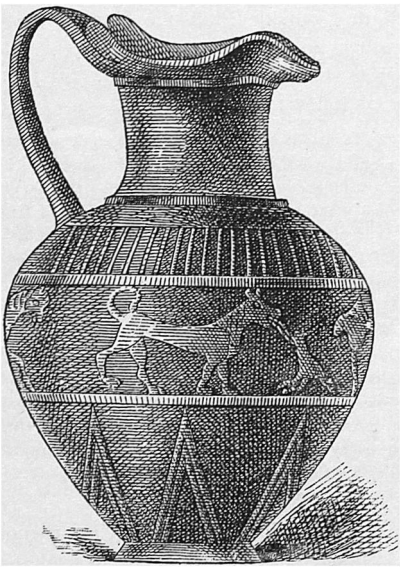


FIG. 1.—BLACK OENOCHOE WITH INCISED DECORATION. FROM VEIA (ITALY).

and of the commoner sorts, the clumsy but interesting Archaic wares are likely to be despised, and the only kind of work which at once meets with recognition is the over-decorated work of the decadence. Even this is poor in color when compared with Chinese and other Oriental objects, which are now so fashionable. Scholars, museums and a few collectors of cultivated taste are the only buyers of Greek vases in America."

"Can you give me the names of a few of the collectors?"

"Mr. Thomas B. Clarke has a very good collection. Mr. Altman, Mr. Prime and Mr. Marquand have considerable collections, and Dr. West, of Brooklyn, has a few choice pieces, which he uses in giving object lessons on Greek archaeology to his class."

"Have not the frauds said to be practised on collectors of antiquities something to do with the unwillingness to invest in Greek vases?"

"Possibly. But I should say that the principal reasons are those which I have given you."

"But there are such frauds?"

"Undoubtedly. There are frauds in almost everything."

"Can you give an instance or two which may be of value to intending collectors?"

"Well, to take something quite recent, I was called in, as an expert, to examine some vases described as antiques. I found that they were patched up from antique fragments with the aid of about twice as much modern plaster, which was painted over to imitate the rest. They were about one third antique and two thirds modern fraudulent imitations."

"This redecoration and patching together with plaster, then, are the frauds most practised?"

"They are almost the only frauds against which an ordinarily well-informed collector will have to guard."

"How do you detect them?"

"It is very easy. A little alcohol rubbed over the part suspected will soon show whether the black paint of the design has been burned in or not. If not, it will dissolve and come away, and so is fraudulent."

"But what is it that usually excites your suspicion in the first place?"

"I will show you. I have got in a lot of vases lately, some of which I have not yet tested. I am pretty sure there will be some attempts at fraudulent restoration found among them."

"Then all restoration is not fraudulent?"

"Certainly not. If a vase or other object is in pieces when found, why should not the pieces be put together? But the trouble arises from the fact that few people will buy a vase which has plainly been mended. Hence it pays those so inclined to hide the joints and renew the abraded decoration."

"Ah, here, is a little cantharus which, I think, will serve for an experiment. You will notice, if you look close, that it has been fractured, but the pieces have been very neatly put together. It is altogether unlikely, however, that the black fret around the rim, if not touched up, would be complete, as it is. Now, see, the black elsewhere is lustrous or oily-looking; that is the characteristic of the black glaze of good Greek pottery; but here, on the rim, it is dull. That makes my suspicion almost a certainty. Now, I rub with pure muriatic acid, as I have no alcohol at hand, the lustrous glaze; I rub hard, but it makes no difference. Neither acid nor alcohol will have any effect at that point. But here, on the rim, observe, the paint becomes first muddy, then liquid, and when I wipe the place it comes almost clean off. Any good black and red vase will stand this test. On this amphora of the later Archaic period the drapery of the figures is executed in lines almost as fine as can be drawn by the etcher's needle; yet, you see, they stand the acid."

"You say the test is good for red and black vases. Is it good for all others?"

"No. Some vases, as a rule of later period, are dec-

This Athenian lecythus, for instance. The white ground of the body of the vase and the traces of rose-color, blue and reddish brown on the figures

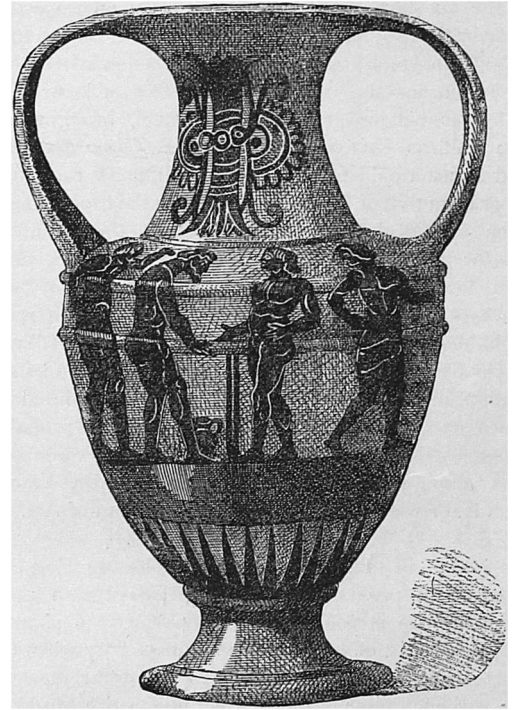


FIG. 2.—CHOUS OF THE STYLE OF NICOSTHENES, CHARACTERIZED BY PALMETTO ORNAMENT ON THE NECK.

which once decorated it would entirely disappear if submitted to the test. But the brilliant black and the transparent brown lines of the foot and mouth would stay."

"How then are such pieces to be tested?"

"The collector must depend on his own or the dealer's knowledge of style, and, in the latter case, of course, on the dealer's honesty. A collector should deal only with people known to be experts, and in whose carefulness and probity he has reason to confide."

"Can a person easily learn to distinguish the different styles of Greek vases?"

"It is not hard to perceive the difference of style between vases of widely different periods, or to tell any of them from the usually clumsy modern imitations; but to classify a large number of vases with any approach to exactness is another matter."

"But vases of the best period, I presume, are of greater value than much earlier or later pieces; and if that is the case, it should be worth while for the collector to acquire a general knowledge of the most marked variations in style?"

"That is correct. But several things count as well as style—preservation and beauty of design among them. Take this little wine pitcher, which will cost \$16.00, though it is of earlier date than the best period, while the lecythus which I have just shown you is worth only \$14.00. The latter was at one time much the handsomer, not only because of its shape, but from its well-drawn and brilliantly colored figures. Now these are almost gone; but the two grotesque black tigers ramping tail to tail on the older oenochoe are just as clear as ever. Well-preserved

specimens of the classical period, if of any considerable size, are very dear."

"Will you give some account of the periods commonly

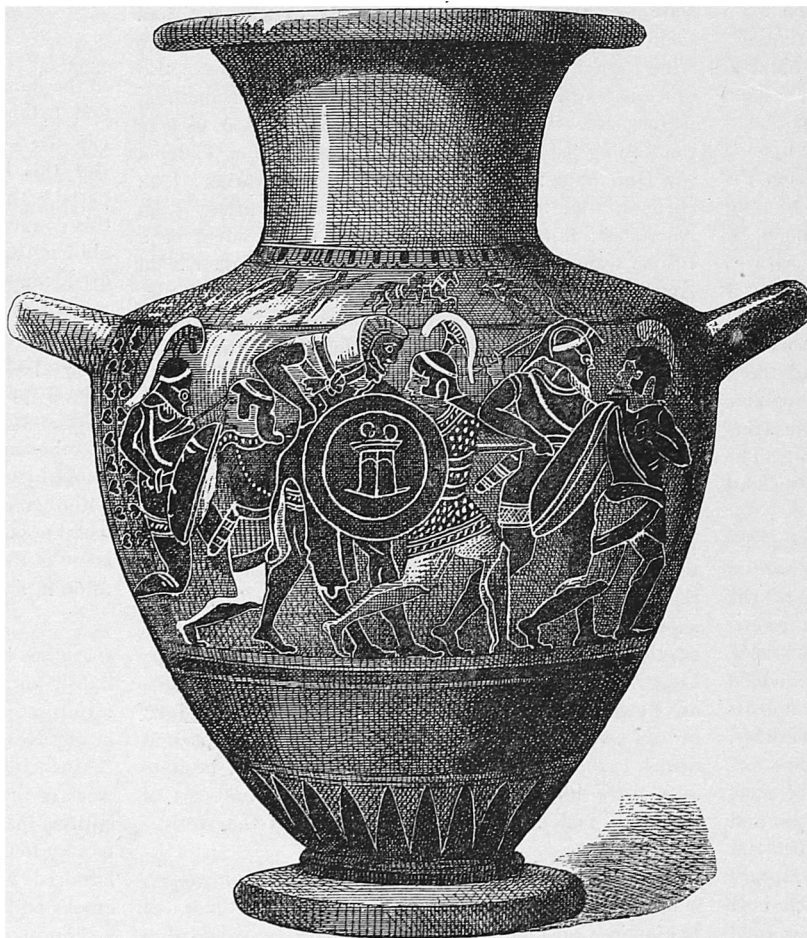


FIG. 3.—BLACK FIGURED STAMNOS (540-460 B.C.) STIFF FIGURES ALMOST ALWAYS SHOWN IN PROFILE, ANGULAR ACTION, FACES WITHOUT EXPRESSION AND UNIFORM IN TYPE.

orated with white and other bright colors and with gold. These will not stand the acid, nor alcohol, nor hard rubbing, for the colors are but slightly burned in?

recognized, with reference to the illustrations which The Art Amateur has prepared?"

"You may say that the main periods not only in Greek pottery but in all Greek art are the Primitive, from about 1200 to 700 before Christ; the Archaic, from 700 to 450; the Classic, from 450 to 228; and the Decadence, from that period until some time after the birth of Christ."

"How are vases of these periods distinguished?"

"Those of Primitive times are very rude, made without the use of the wheel, and commonly take the form of the human figure, very rudely imitated. Our best specimens are from the island of Santorin, where they are found under a bed of lava. Others, from the Cyclades, show spiral ornaments, and still others, from Mykenæ, are ornamented with handsome geometric patterns and some attempts at delineation of animals. These vases are very interesting to archæologists, but are what may be styled museum pieces, and private collectors can hardly be expected to care for them. They are very similar to Peruvian and Missouri pottery, which might readily be passed off for them."

"What about the Archaic pieces?"

"They include many styles that are worthy of the collector's attention. They are at first decorated with zones of grotesque animals, like your Fig. 1, which is an



FIG. 4.—BLACK FIGURED HYDRIA PANATHENAIKE (540-460 B.C.)

œnochoë or wine pitcher of Greek make, though found at Veia in Italy. Commonly the decoration is in black on the red clay, the details being given by engraved lines, as may be seen in the vase of the style of Nicos-thenes (Fig. 2), who flourished about the close of the Archaic period, and whose work may generally be known by the palmetto or lotus design on the neck. The colors are glossy black and purple of manganese on a reddish or cream-colored clay. They are well burned in, at times slightly vitrified, glossy and transparent. In late works the female figures and some accessories are in white, as in your figures 3, 4 and 5. Asiatic influence is apparent at the beginning of the period in the vases with zones of animals; but the Greek genius reasserts itself toward the end, in the black-figured vases. The action, however, is stiff, even in these latter vases."

"Where would you place the beginning of the fine style?"

"Some of the black-figured vases would come into this style, but the majority, especially of the earlier pieces, are decorated with red figures reserved upon a black ground, the details drawn with the brush, not incised as in your Fig. 6, which is a lecythus of good style."

"As to the polychrome vases?"

"They are also of the Classic period, and some of them, especially the beautiful Athenian lecythic, with white grounds, are among the very finest examples of Greek ceramic art."

"What were the colors principally employed?"



FIG. 6.—LECYTHUS.

"Bright yellow, pink, pale blue, reddish brown, dark brown, purple and black. The ground of the body of the vase is a covering apparently of a preparation of gypsum, and the colors seem to have been applied in distemper, like those of the Pompeian frescoes, then slightly burned in. A little gold-leaf was used on the ornaments."

"Some are decorated with figures in relief, are they not?"

"Yes, and when fine, they are very rare and dear. A very fine example is the Hermitage vase, from the Imperial Museum at St. Petersburg. The cup, Fig. 8, in black clay with reliefs is Italian, and is representative of native Etruscan art."

"Of the vases of the Decadence what would you say to collectors?"

"Some, like your Fig. 9, are imposing and highly decorative in general effect; but as a rule they are overloaded with ornament. There is an attempt to combine all manners of working reliefs with paintings, red figures, black figures, incisions, reserves and gilding. Purity of form gradually disappears until we come down to what might be called the Roman period, when the art is as bad as in the early Archaic."

THE black patina often found on Japanese iron work, and which preserves the metal and makes an admirable background for silver and gold inlay, is gained by simply heating the metal over a green pine-wood fire, the steam and tarry smoke from which produces a coating of black magnetic oxide. The rich red patina on copper, known here as Gorham red, is simply the suboxide of the metal. A solution of antimonious chloride in hydrochloric acid will give a puce hue to bronze and copper. Platinic chloride will give a steel gray, and alkaline sulphides various shades of brown.



FIG. 7.—ETRUSCAN CUP FROM ITALY.

#### A MANUFACTORY OF ANTIQUITIES.

THE beautiful Etruscan iridescent "tear vials" which one sees in museums and certain private collections are cleverly imitated now, like nearly all other antiquities. A writer in Cassell's Saturday Journal stood by while one was produced in London by an old German who makes a business of manufacturing ancient relics. He says: "On the table lay two blowpipes with platinum tips and several long-pronged pincers. Directly behind these stood a large pasteboard box brimful of pieces of glass and empty homœopathic medicine bottles. My host smiled as he caught the puzzled look which stole over my face. . . . He took the pincers and inserted one of its long jaws into a medicine bottle from the collection. This done, he twirled it gently over the gas for half a minute. 'It must heat gradually or it will crack,' he said, in explanation. Next, placing a blowpipe to his lips, he blew a steady flame against the glass until it glowed with roseate fire and began to fuse. A portion of its surface caved in; he turned it over, blowing all the while, until the vial lost all its symmetry and presented four irregular sides, each indented. Then, quick as a flash, he threw the molten fragments into a pan of reddish powder, and rolled it and twisted it about with his pincers. 'That is metallic oxide of copper,' he ex-

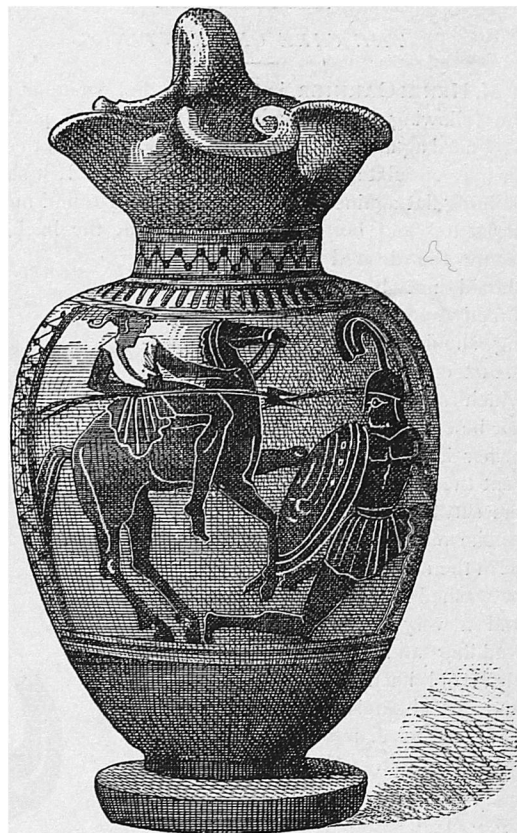


FIG. 5.—œNOCHOE, DECORATED WITH BLACK FIGURES ON RED GROUND.

plained, as he picked the vial out and started blowing. Again the glass began to fuse, and the antiquity maker, with a second pair of pincers, drew what had once been the bottom of the vial out into a cone-shaped point. A fine rasp was passed over the entire surface, after which the glowing vial was whisked through a pan of powdered resin. It was next dipped into gold powder, silver powder, and green aniline dye. A final fusing, and then the mouth of the unrecognizable bottle was crimped into little scallops with a wire instrument resembling a miniature crimping tongs. The metamorphosis was complete! An ordinary medicine bottle had been changed into a beautiful iridescent tear vial before my very eyes. 'There!' triumphantly exclaimed the antiquity maker, as he stuck the tear vial into a perforated pasteboard stand to cool. 'I buy those little bottles for about five pence a dozen, and I can sell that tear vial easily for eight shillings. That is, I can sell it for that if anybody wants it, but there is not a steady demand for tear vials.' 'What do you do with all those broken files?' I inquired, pointing to a good-sized chest half filled with them. 'Old files make the very best of steel,' replied the magician of the workshop. 'I melt them and hammer them out to make the blades of Venetian daggers. Look, I have a portable forge in here;' and, so saying, he opened the door into a smaller room. Sure enough there stood a tiny forge, and beside it a work-bench littered with tools. Among them lay a quaint female figure. I picked it up. It was silver, and quite heavy. 'That is the hilt



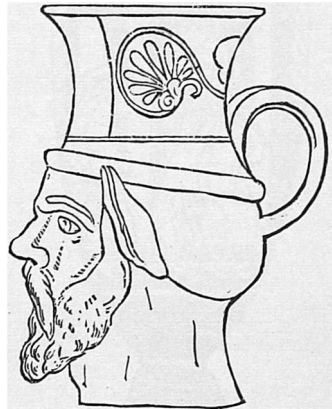
of a dagger,' my host exclaimed. 'It is not pure silver; the inside is lead. Yes, it looks very ancient, but I cast it myself only the day before yesterday. What makes its surface so worn and rough? I sprinkled it with nitric acid out of this little stone flask, and then washed it off quickly. Here is a finished dagger. What do you think of it?' It was a magnificent weapon, and I said so, at the same time expressing surprise at the gold filigree embedded in the blue steel blade. 'I thought the secret of that sort of work perished with the sword-makers of Damascus,' said I. The manufacturer gave no information on that subject, however, but pointed to a row of statuettes which lined a shelf above my head. There they stood—gods, goddesses, and demigods, nymphs, satyrs, dryads, naiads, and nereids—all antique, all more or less green with verdigris, and all more or less dilapidated. Had they been what they purported to be, £1300 would have been little enough to pay for the collection. 'You would not think, to look at them,' said the old German, with the honest pride of a craftsman, 'that every one of them came from that junk heap which you saw in the other room.' Little by little, during subsequent visits, I extracted from him the details of that mysterious alchemy by which he transmuted a hideous modern imitation into an old Greek masterpiece. It is easy enough when one knows how to do it."

#### THE CARE OF PAINTINGS.

M. HENRI GARNIER, in the *Guide de l'Amateur*, gives the following sensible advice to owners of pictures: To guard against humidity, care should be taken that the air may circulate freely around the picture. If it should be hung flat against the wall, a small half-round moulding at top and bottom of the frame, at the back, will secure the desired result. The sun should not be permitted to shine directly upon a picture. No oil painting should be hung on a chimney-breast or on a part of a wall back of which a flue passes. Pictures should not be covered like furniture when the owner is away from home. To prevent the formation of a dirty crust by the settling on the varnish of dust, smoke and other matters which may be in the atmosphere, paintings should be washed frequently with warm water and a very fine sponge or a roll of wadding and dried with a piece of clean old linen or a particularly fine and soft chamois skin. Soap should never be used, nor should paintings be "oiled out." Soap destroys many pigments, and oil, becoming incorporated with them, changes their tone; besides which, it sinks into the cracks of the varnish, and, coming out again at the next change of temperature, tends to widen them.

It is a fact, as the *Guide de l'Amateur* points out, that the process of cleaning destroys more pictures than any other cause. Those especially who use patent or secret preparations are to blame for many a disaster. Other methods, not secret, but no less pernicious, are to clean with black soap, caustic potash, lavender water, pulverized camphor, baths of oil, and, above all, with a scraper or eraser. Varnishes made of or mixed with gum copal, isinglass, animal fats and white of eggs are likewise condemned. In particular cases, some of the above means may have to be used, but with the greatest care and only as a matter of necessity. The careful and conscientious practitioner will confine himself as much as possible to rubbing with the tip of the finger, aided perhaps by moistening with very dilute alcohol. There is this to be said against the practice of cleaning by rubbing with the finger, that it leaves numerous little specks of dirt in the interstices of the canvas, where the painting is thin, and in the furrows of the brush marks when it is in impasto. The finger cannot get into these minute crevices. The process, too, is dangerous for large canvases, which may be imperfectly

stretched in causing unequal tension, sagging and fissures in the paint. There is also the danger that you may rub too long or too hard; but by adopting the "spiritous method" the mixture of alcohol and spirits of turpentine which is used dissolves the dirty varnish slowly, and, the results being visible at all stages, its action can be stopped at any moment. Under the finger, again, the dirt which is being removed acts like fine sand or



CANOPE, WITH HEAD OF FAUN.

emery powder on the solid painting, wearing it away. This is so well understood that there is a special term for pictures which have so suffered; they are called "epidermes" or "skinned" paintings.

A beginner at the work should, then, content himself with what he can do with the mixture of spirit of wine with a much larger quantity of spirits of turpentine. The proportions should be changed only when a picture is covered with a very thick coat of dirt, and then only



FIG. 8.—VASE FOUND AT CUMÆ. IN THE IMPERIAL MUSEUM, "L'HERMITAGE," ST. PETERSBURG.

at the commencement of the operation. It is better to leave a little dirt than to take away any of the substance of the painting. If the picture is not by a great artist, it may even owe most of any charm which it possesses to the mellow tone produced by age; and since there is great danger that this will vanish in any sort of cleaning process, it is decidedly better, as a rule, not to make any attempt to clean such pictures at all.

Alkalies, such as soda, sulphuric ether, sal ammoniac, potash and salts of tartar, and alkaline preparations, as soap, soap and brandy, no matter how dilute, are always dangerous for the whites, the blues and certain lakes. The former become greenish and all full of holes in time under their constant action; for they cannot be quite removed once they are applied, particles sink into the pores of the picture and continue their action there.

The immersion of a picture in a bath of any kind of liquid may result in causing the ground of the canvas to separate itself from the tissue—one of the worst troubles known to the picture-restorer.

#### PASTES AND PRECIOUS STONES.

A CERTAIN clique of English artists and amateurs has undertaken to make the wearing of precious stones unfashionable. They pretend that the colors of gems are common and vulgar. The green of the emerald, says one of them, is the best, but is as vulgar as house-painting beside the green of bird's plumage or of clear water. No diamond, he maintains, shows colors so pure as a dewdrop; the ruby looks half washed out compared to the dianthus, and the carbuncle is not prettier than a pomegranate seed. The admirers of precious stones might be satisfied to grant the truth of all these assertions, seeing that dewdrops and pomegranate seeds are not very lasting; but Professor Church, in a recent work of his, disproves them, and shows good reasons for preferring the colors of gems, at the same time giving some valuable hints as to how to distinguish true gems from artificial imitations. The diamond, he points out, has a wonderful surface lustre, and greater refractive and dispersive power combined with greater transparency than water possesses. It gives out more numerous and purer colors, more brilliant and of a finer tone than any other sort of matter. The emerald exhibits two distinct hues of green, and has consequently a play of color for which it would be idle to look in any paint. The ruby shows also a vibration of hue between purple red and crimson red.

The same detractors of precious stones insist, if they are worn at all, that they must be cut "en cabochon," or round-topped. This plan, Professor Church says, is appropriate only to non-transparent gems, such as the moonstone, opal, cat's-eye and chrysoprase. Applied to transparent gems, it fails to bring out the full play of color, because internal reflection is imperfect, and it does not give effect to the dispersive power of the stone, upon which depends its "fire."

A sure way to distinguish a real gem from an imitation is to analyze the light from each by means of a prism. No matter how closely the tint of the former may have been imitated, it will be sure to furnish a different spectrum. Another plan, we may add, is to let the rays of an electric light fall through both on some plane surface. Pastes, being only a peculiar kind of glass, show the amorphous structure of that material, while gems show a regular structure, if any. The peculiarities of the so-called star-stones—the star-ruby and star-sapphire—are due to their crystalline structure, and cannot be imitated. These stones should be cut with a flat top across the principal axis of the original crystal. When this flat surface is looked at by sunlight or other bright light, a six-rayed star makes its appearance on it. Some varieties of red garnet occasionally show a four-rayed star. The peculiar effect of moonstones and cat's-eyes

is due to the same cause—viz., internal structure, in these cases often complicated by the presence of foreign substances. In one of the commoner sorts of cat's-eyes there are fine parallel fibres of asbestos, which catch and reflect the light. In the African tiger-eye, which is another kind of cat's-eye, the silicious substance of the stone is crowded with parallel fibres of another substance containing iron, which gives its deep golden

and brown hues to the stone. The most precious of the cat's-eyes is the chrysoberyl, which is yellow, yellowish green or brown, and, when properly cut, shows a line of pale bluish light. Moonstones look best set with dark, clear amethysts. The colors of opal are due to minute internal fissures. The so-called opalescent glass shows only one sort of "fire," a dull red like that of a glass lamp seen through fog. It is due to a similar cause, the glass having been made turbid by a mixture of bone-earth or tin-binoxide. The greenish light which appears in yellow uranium glass is produced in a different manner. It is a sort of fluorescence, and is owing to the excitation of a vibration in the molecules of the glass by some of the rays which pass through it.

We have referred to the play of color in twin-colored stones, and given the colors of the ruby. The sapphire shows ultramarine blue and greenish blue; the emerald, pure emerald green and yellowish green; the tourmaline, according to the variety, rose color and salmon, orange brown and greenish yellow, or blue green and yellowish green. The topaz shows a play of straw color and pink, and the amethyst reddish purple and violet purple. The garnet and spinel show only the one color in the single specimen, though having a great range of color in different specimens, the spinel including all the colors of the rainbow and some others, such as pink and purple.

Various lacquers and varnishes are often used to preserve and color metals. Even gold is varnished in some Eastern countries. The best varnish for iron and steel is made with dragon's-blood resin, which bronzes the metals. The appearance of gilding on old Spanish and Dutch leathers has been gained by brushing over silver or tin leaf with a varnish containing extract of cucuma wood, saffron and gamboge. The modern red, blue and green varnishes are made with aniline dyes.

As a curious example of what prices persons will pay for things apparently valueless, the Paris correspondent of The London Daily News quotes the market value of certain rare postage stamps: "A well-known dealer offers £4 15s. for every Tuscan stamp earlier than 1860, and £16 for particularly fine examples. Mauritius stamps of 1847 are estimated—by the purchaser, mind—at 2000 fr., and post-marks of British Guiana of 1836 from 500 fr. to 1000 fr. Eighty pounds for a soiled bit of paper that has no beauty to recommend it! Probably no drawing of equal size from the very hand of Raphael or Leonardo would be priced nearly so high as these grubby old stamps. Yet the drawing would be not only a thing of art, beautiful in itself, but also a personal relic of the famous artist."

#### METALLIC LUSTRES.

THERE is no doubt that the fine prismatic lustres observable on many pieces of old Chinese porcelain are due to thin films of metal reduced in firing from some compound mixed in the glaze. The finest of these lustres are on old pieces of coral and other reds, and are due, probably, to an admixture of the chloride of gold. The

lary successful with the copper lustres and also with the "madreperla" lustre of delicate lilac, blue, pale green and yellow tints, which is due to silver. In the Arabian court of Sir Frederick Leighton's splendid London house he has used some of the De Morgan copies of Persian tiles side by side with real ones—of which he has a remarkable collection—and only an expert would notice the difference between the new and the old. The iridescent glaze so much admired on Belleek wares is due to bismuth, and is the invention of M. Brianchon.

There is here a wide field for amateur potters to experiment in; and, though the difficulties are many, it may be profitable, for large manufacturers are willing to pay well for secrets relating to new lustres or old ones rediscovered.

THOSE innocent persons who think they can buy rare Oriental porcelain, such as Satsuma and Ming, at a bargain in Europe, should have their eyes opened by the perusal of the last number of The Journal of the Oriental Society of Pekin, in which Dr. Bushell translates the work of one Hsiang, who appears to have been a noted connoisseur and collector in his day. Hsiang mentions that he knew \$65 to be given for an 8-inch Ming vase, while the General of the Guards at Pekin gave \$3000 for a deep-red wine-pot, also Ming, 6½ inches high. Many other examples of higher prices are mentioned by Hsiang, and Dr. Bushell proves from contemporary writers that these prices are by no means exaggerated. The truth is that native collectors will give more than Europeans or Americans for specimens of the best porcelain, which consequently rarely find their way across the sea.

ITALIAN archæologists, who for some time have been at work uncovering the ancient Greek city of Sybaris, in Italy, have lighted upon evidences of a more ancient city upon which Sybaris was built. The necropolis is in an undisturbed state, and adds strong evidence to the belief in a high Italic civilization prior to the Etruscan and contemporaneous with the building of the Pyramids. Italian scientists place its decline at 1000 B.C., and believe that its people were the real inventors of the prehistoric walls which exist all over Italy where there are no signs of Etruscan habitation. A

report shortly to be issued under the auspices of the Italian Government is claimed to be a complete demonstration of this pre-Etruscan civilization.

THREE important Roman statues have been discovered: one of the Emperor Hadrian, another of Antoninus, and the third a small Bacchus. All three are well preserved, and of excellent workmanship.



LARGE GREEK VASE OF THE DECADENCE, WITH MODELLED AND PAINTED DECORATION.

ruby and golden lustres of old Italian majolica, the yellow, bronze and copper of Hispano-Moorish platters and the golden and purple bronze hues seen on old blue-enamelled Persian wares have all been produced from similar metallic ingredients of the glaze. Modern experimenters have succeeded in reproducing some of these lustres and in discovering some new effects. Mr. W. De Morgan, of Chelsea, England, has been particu-